Chapter 10

Mapping

One important aspect of cultural research is the physical setting where a fieldworker collects the data. A researcher can draw sketches of the location, produce maps, and in general describe where activities take place. Various types of maps are helpful to researchers including initial sketches, folk maps, sketches, professional quality maps, and historical maps. Each type of mapping has its place within cultural research.

Be aware that mapping can be a sensitive issue in many countries. It can arouse suspicion about the researcher's motives. Aerial mapping seems particularly suspect in some countries.

Initial Sketches

When a researcher first enters a new culture, he or she often makes initial sketches of what is visible and measurable. Such initial sketches do not require knowledge of the local language. In initial sketches the researcher may decide to assign numbers to each household as a means of reference. Numbers may later be correlated with households headed by specific people. These data serve as the basis for random selection of houses within which to administer an interview schedule or questionnaire.

In making such initial sketches the researcher paces off specific fields or plots of land, thereby gaining some idea of the amount of land each household has.

Initial sketches can include such features as roads, paths, railroads, schools, buildings used for religious purposes (e.g. churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, and local religious buildings), sites of ritual activities, markets, transportation parks for public transport, shops, governmental offices, cemeteries, public facilities (e.g. wells, washing areas, etc.), factories, farms, hills, rivers, streams, etc. Since researchers use maps and sketches to document their specific research projects, what is included depends upon the research purpose.

Later, after gaining a working knowledge of the language, the researcher may produce a folk map in order to better describe the culture.

Folk Maps

Folk maps depict what is significant from the insider's perspective. Depending upon the focus of maps and the research documented, folk maps may indicate specific areas and objects such as sacred trees, areas where specific activities occur, areas where spirits are known to dwell, and so forth. Either an outside researcher with the aid of an insider or an insider to the culture may produce folk maps. In either case resultant maps detail information relevant to the insider's knowledge of the area and culture. Researchers may desire several folk maps each of which focuses upon a different aspect of the culture.

Sketches

Some researchers, particularly those with artistic talent, produce sketches that go a long ways towards enabling a reader to visualize the social scene they describe.

Professional Quality Maps

For publication a cultural researcher may decide that he or she needs a professional quality map of the area. When there is no professional quality map available for a specific area, this becomes the researcher's responsibility . As a start in producing such a map, most countries have federal geographic survey offices that produce maps, frequently made from aerial photographs; such maps can serve as the basis of the new, more detailed, map(s). Frequently such aerial maps fail to identify specific villages though they may indicate residence clusters by dots on the map. Further, such maps may be out-of-date concerning location of current villages.

A cultural researcher may find that more than one map is appropriate for the local area. For example, one map may have names of villages in the trade language, while another may present village names in the minority language. Differing names may exist for villages, towns, cities, rivers, lakes, and other geographic features in the national, trade, and minority languages.

Researchers then use the available maps as the base for producing professional quality maps of the local area, adding data collected locally. Frequently, prior to publication, some cultural researchers and historians have professional cartographers and artists produce final professional quality maps. For such professional maps identify the source maps to give some idea of the reliability and quality of the finished products. Produce the new maps in such a way that they do not violate copyright laws. For example, avoid using any special symbols, particular design, or copyrighted typeface designs that are specific to the source map.

Historical Maps

Researchers may desire to include within their write-ups historical maps that illustrate boundary disputes, areas where significant events occurred such as wars, migrations, trade routes, locations of former villages and camps, and so forth. Sometimes such maps are available in archives, and at other times researchers produce them based on information collected locally.

Chapter 12

Life Histories

An ethnographic description presents information on pregnancy, birth practices, naming practices and rituals, puberty, age-grades, marriage, death, etc. Collection of life histories is a method researchers utilize in order to write about specific people's lives. They relate the abstractions of ethnographic description to lives of individuals by looking at life cycles of individuals within specific cultures.

Life histories contribute to our knowledge of the socialization process. They allow us to relate the individual to the wider culture. A further function of life histories is to add time depth to a synchronic study of a culture.

Researchers have collected life histories almost exclusively from adults, and most have collected of them from males fifty years of age or older. Some scholars are beginning to correct this imbalance in research focus by writing life histories of women, as, for example, Romero (1988); Blackman (1985, 1990); Allison, Jacobs, and Porter (1989); Mirza and Strobel (1989) (who have published on life histories of several African women); and Brettell (1983) (who detailed the life histories of three Portuguese migrant women). Some life histories look at key individuals within a society, as in the case of Barth collected the life history of a king in the northern Pakistan state of Swat (1985).

In order to protect individuals, some anthropologists have used information from life histories to write fictional anthropological novels. Such novels are based on fact and can provide a good picture of that culture from an insider's viewpoint.

Problems in Collecting and Analyzing Life Histories

Problems in collecting and analyzing life histories may arise in the following areas:

1. Translation
2. Sequencing of events
3. Interpretation
4. Chronology - if there is no sense of an accurate chronology, anthropologists usually describe life histories as case studies, and note the lack of an accurate chronology. Problems with establishing an accurate chronology may be addressed by developing a *local time line* based on specific local occurrences.
5. Representativeness of ages and sexes
6. Insufficient life histories collected from the same ethnic group to allow for comparison and assessment of the extent to which those individuals represent that ethnic group.
7. Collection and transcription of life histories tend to be time consuming.
8. Motivation of individuals may be a problem. Some individuals may feel the need 'to let off steam' over some issue.
9. Exaggeration of individuals may be a problem. Some may tell researchers what they think ethnographers would want to hear rather than what actually occurred.

Methodology for Collecting Life Histories

The following are suggestions that might be of help in collecting life histories:

1. Do basic ethnographic research first before working on a life history, research that includes participant observation, interviews, etc. This should help in knowing significant areas to include; it should also help the analyst not to blunder into sensitive areas of the culture.
2. Select a source individual carefully and establish good rapport with him or her.
3. Visit this individual in his or her natural setting in order to see what types of interactions he or she has with others, in order to assess his or her reliability and/or representativeness.
4. 'Prime the pump' by telling stories about the analyst's own life. It helps to give a feeling of sharing.
5. Be as nondirective as possible. Refrain from interrupting. Leading questions such as, 'Please tell me about your life as a child,' or 'What was it like to grow up here?' help to elicit the desired data. If the analyst is collecting a life history that requires more than one session, between sessions he or she may think of questions raised in the previous session to ask in the next session.
6. Be aware that the subject matter collected is personal. This is where the development a trust relationship with that individual is essential.
7. Maintain the ethical responsibility to protect that individual. This may involve disguising name, places, and other individuals through use of fictitious names for people and places. You may also consider having him or her a co-author. If he or she is a co-author, the individual then has the prerogative to edit the manuscript. Publishers may require written permission from any individual who contributes a life history before publication.
8. Tape record the data, so that in transcribing it there is a verbatim record (see Ives 1980). Use of folk terms, special phrases, etc., add color and interest to the write-up.
9. Record date, place, interviewer, interviewee, and anything else that is significant (e.g. others present).
10. Give a copy of the life history to the individual.

When collecting a life history from a specific person, the researcher may discover that the individual is atypical of the culture. At that point the fieldworker must make a decision whether or not to continue. Freeman faced this situation in recording the life history of an untouchable man. He states,

> I determined that as part of my two-year anthropological study of Muli's village, I would collect the first detailed life history of an ordinary Indian untouchable, perhaps Muli's if he were willing . . . . Muli was articulate, detailed, voluble. I asked him if he would tell me the story of his life. He looked puzzled, 'What does the story of my life mean?'
>
> 'Oh, about what you did when you were a child, the games you played, how you became married, the work you do, your friends, things like that.'
>
> 'Sure, why not?' (Freeman 1979:6,7).

As the research proceeded with almost daily interviews over a six month period, Freeman found he had selected a pimp with an attraction to transvestites.

> I now realized with dismay that not only had I selected him, but he had selected me as a way to earn easy money and possibly involve me with his prostitutes. Clearly by

his own account, he was a deviant in his culture, a weak, sickly man unable to do men's work, often living entirely on his wife's earnings, constantly embroiled in scandals, a self-confessed liar and scoundrel whose schemes often brought disaster not only to himself but to everybody associated with him (Freeman 1979:20).

Because this was not the type of person Freeman had intended to collect a life history from, he decided to discontinue interviewing this untouchable who so clearly fit the stereotype held by the high castes of untouchables as being lazy, ignorant, and unreliable. However, his research assistant dissuaded him from doing so because at that time in the agricultural cycle other men would not be available, and because he recognized that many of the things Muli said were true. Some of what Muli narrated seemed so atypical that Freeman and his language assistant discretely checked with others to verify his narratives. This seemed especially important to do when working with a man who was a self-admitted liar.

Freeman asked himself about the representativeness of Muli's life history:

> The details and the manner of telling the stories reflect Muli's distinctive style, but the environment of extreme poverty, social stigma, economic exploitation, and discrimination against untouchables is a reality shared by all Bauris [untouchables] of Muli's community and most Bauris elsewhere. Muli's own life style represents one of only three possible adaptations ordinarily available to Bauri men and women: the life of unskilled laborers; the life of shamanistic faith healers; and the life of transvestites, pimps, and prostitutes. These life styles are neither incompatible nor mutually exclusive, but like Muli most Bauris emphasize one of them more than the others (Freeman 1979:34).

Clyde Kluckhohn observed that life histories involve not only narratives of individuals' lives, but also the way researchers obtained the life histories, including some evaluation of the trustworthiness of the data, the way that individuals' lives integrate with other ethnographic data about the culture, and interpretation of life histories into a coherent conceptual scheme (Kluckhohn 1945:91).

Cultural Baggage of Researcher

Romero addresses the question of the perspective that the researcher brings to the collection of life histories. She states concerning the contributing authors in her book on life histories of African women,

> The same individuality [as that of the women written about] is also present in the contributors to this volume. They, like their subjects, have their own cultural baggage which they carry with them to their fields of specialization. Several different scholarly disciplines are represented here--yet even among specialists sharing the same field, methods and questions differ. Harold Scheub is a folklorist. The questions he asks of his living subject, Mrs. Zenari, differ from those historian Ivor Wilks requests from his documents. In addition, Scheub as a linguist, is concerned not only with the content of the life history, but also with *how* the story is told (Romero 1988:1-2).

Folklorists, historians including oral historians, linguists, anthropologists, and other social scientists bring their own perspectives to the collection of life histories. They do so by various means including the questions they ask, the subjects they choose to write about, and their means of analyzing the data they collect.

Life Histories in Ethnographic Descriptions

Fieldworkers use life histories, including shorter life histories that are sometimes characterized as case studies, in ethnographic descriptions primarily as illustrative or explanatory material. An important question in using life histories is that of representativeness. A researcher would have to collect perhaps a minimum of thirty life histories in order to begin to make statements about representativeness. Nevertheless, life histories bring the abstractions of ethnographic description and analysis to the level of their reality in individuals' lives. For linguists, life histories provide text material for discourse analysis while also providing good cultural data.

Individuals presented in life histories interact with others within societies through social networks. The following chapter addresses the collection and analysis of social networks.